Galsworthy Sticks to One Furrow, but He Plows Deep

Another Book of Plays

"The Skin Game," One of the Series, Compares Well With "Strife"

By Rebecca Drucker

IT IS unfair to quarrel with an author because he does not carry within himself an unlimited range of people and experiences. Sooner or later the paths of his perceptions wear certain recognizable ruts, the points of life to which he reacts become inevitably defined. It is fairly evident by this time that John Galsworthy's allotted section of life is not a wide one. He has often enough ploughed his field deeply into powerful expression. But something in his repressed English upper-class habit of mind has kept him from that pushing curiosity by which he might have extended his boundaries. Yet it is not so much the tether of his experiences by which he is checked as by certain inhibitions, certain blind spots which within his natural limitations form inner boundaries.

There are certain patterns of life and character which fascinate and mesmerize him, so that before them he is reduced to merely automatic gestures. He cannot remove himself outside their range of influence and he cannot dominate them. These susceptibilities are illustrated afresh in a new volume of plays, the Fourth Series (Scribner's). There are sounding echoes in "A Bit o' Love,' as well as in "The Foundations." Here in "A Bit o' Love" is a curious reiteration of the figure of the saint in "Saint's Progress." As in that novel, the principal figure is a clergyman, a man of strong passions deflected into self-denial. It is not his daughter who sins, as in the novel, but his wife—and against the derision of a coarse-grained world and against the insistence of his own desires, he keeps faith with his ideals and his Christianity.

Saintliness with Mr. Galsworthy wears certain recognizable habiliments. It implies a certain convention of behavior, the convention of St. Francis of Assisi. He follows the convention earnestly, to the point of copying the formula, yet the figure of Strangway in "A Bit o' Love" is no more than an imitation and a rather grotesque one. These English clergymen with their ecstasies in the moonlight, their not quite adult companionships with birds and flowers, their oversweet murmuring about love, are faintly repelling. There is something banal in them as in a chromo, something indicating an obtuse place in Mr. Galsworthy as an artist that gives him leave to substitute an obvious, worn, oversentimentalized literary symbol for spontaneous emotion.

It is clear that Mr. Galsworthy is eager to put down the figure of the saint in modern life, and equally clear that he comes up against the same obstacle in himself each time—something that keeps him circling around the same conception, and that shuts him off from seeing it afresh. The same thing may be said to be true of his play, "The Foundations." Here he goes back to that earlier theme that he saw in its inexorable deadlock in "Strife." The struggle of the classes, each with their own justifications, each with their own tenacities, is the substance of his play, but Galsworthy has mixed with it something of the fantastic quality of "The Little Dream" and a great deal of his later-day sentimentality. It is a little hard to fancy the Galsworthy of "Strife" writing a play of a labor struggle in which the crash is averted by the great lord offering the old seamstress a pension of ten bob a week—even though the play is chiefly at the swift tempo of burlesque.

But in "The Skin Game," where Mr. Galsworthy is breaking no lances against old inhibitions, he has written a play of such surprising vitality that it revives the faith in the power of the Galsworthy of "Strife" and "Justice." Here is a play, clear-cut, true and filled with a genuine feeling for the quality of living, that tells powerfully the story of a social feud in an English county town. It is the struggle between the Ins and Outs—and old self-made Hornblower, aggressive, obstinate and thick-skinned, determined to buy for his family a place in county society, meets an opponent of his own quality in the aristocratic Mrs. Hillcrist. The depths of squalid conducts to which the feud leads, the ruin it works on innocent people, the smirchings of self-disgust it leaves on ordinarily fine and kindly people—the primitive quality of it—all this Galsworthy seizes with sensitiveness, with imaginativeness, with imagination, with that power for fluid characterization that he has at his best. This is the Galsworthy of his best—the Galsworthy who puts down things as they are without painting the lily or gilding refined gold. It has sometimes been said that Galsworthy's passion for fairness was his weakness. Yet his finest work has been done in that heat. "What is it," cries Hillcrist, "that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not? What blinding evil! Begin as you may, it ends in this—skin game! Skin game!" This play is a resurgence of that spirit of austere restraint in which pity does not degenerate into limp maudlinity.

COVER design of Richard Washburn Child's "The Vanishing Men," published by E. P. Dutton & Co.

Peace Conference Impressions

English Liberal Describes Events at Paris and Pleads for League of Nations

MR. H. WILSON HARRIS, who was special correspondent of "The London Daily News" at the peace conference, sets down his impressions of that historic gathering in "The Peace in the Making" (Dutton). Mr. Harris's book is much shorter, less pretentious, less full of anecdotes and less contradictory than Dr. Dillon's. It is less controversial than Mr. Keynes's. As a rule, the author is a reporter first and a critic second.

Mr. Harris is a middle-of-the-road man. He is not entirely satisfied with the peace, but feels that it was perhaps the best obtainable under the circumstances. He mitigates his criticism of some of its terms by observing that the league of nations will be an instrument for softening and revising them. He is a consistent supporter of President Wilson.

Indorsing the fourteen points program, he believes that Mr. Wilson was right in sacrificing its complete achievement in order to restore peace to Europe. Mr. Harris does not seem very familiar with American political sentiment and nowhere anticipates the volume of opposition to the league and the treaty in their present form which has developed in the United States Senate.

The author's sharpest criticism of the Allied governments is directed against their handling of the Russian situation. He is convinced that the Prinkipo, Bullitt and Nansen plans all presented excellent opportunities for the restoration of peace and commercial intercourse betwen Russia and the rest of the world.

As regards the final terms of the settlement he is mildly critical. He feels that it was a mistake for the Allies to exceed their original stipulation, under the armistice terms, of exacting from Germans only the cost of the damage actually inflicted by the Teutonic armed forces by including separation and pension allowances in Germany's reparation bill. The mere collection of damages, in his opinion, will tax Germany's capacity to pay to the utmost.

The author has no description of Mr. Wilson, Mr. Lloyd George and M. Clemenceau to be compared with Mr. Keynes's classic historical chapter, "When the Big Four Met." He does, however, relate several more or less apocryphal anecdotes of the conference and he indicates the general line along which English, French and American policies were directed.

As a rule Mr. Wilson was most lenient and M. Clemenceau was most severe in discussions of the terms to be imposed upon the Central Powers; while Mr. Lloyd George played the part of a somewhat vacillating mediator. There was one notable exception to this general rule. Mr. Lloyd George was more hostile to Poland's aspirations than Mr. Wilson. It was due chiefly to the attitude of the British Premier that two million Germans were prevented from coming under Polish rule.

Mr. Harris's book does not aim or pretend to be a detailed history of the work of the peace conference, with its world-wide implications. It is a plain statement of the most important facts connected with the making of the treaty, stripped of non-essentials and vague rumors, and presented with a minimum of partisanship. It should possess an undoubted appeal for a large class of American readers.

A Study of Modern France

Robert Dell Interprets French Institutions in the Spirit of Voltaire

ON THE title page of Robert Dell's book, "My Second Country (France)," published by John Lane, appears the following quotation from Anatole France:

"La France de Voltaire et de Montesquieu—cella-là est la grande, la vraie France."

Mr. Dell's loyalty is pledged to his conception of this "great, true France" of Voltaire and Montesquieu. His sweeping and sometimes bitter criticisms of existing French political and economic institutions probably will impress conservative readers as harsh and unjust. But ignorance, the most frequent cause of national hatreds and prejudices, cannot be laid to the account of Mr. Dell. He knows France's past through enthusiastic study of its revolutionary historical traditions; he knows modern France well by long residence. And he has come to love and respect the French people by living among them. His first chapter is a comparison of the French with the English, much to the disadvantage of the latter. He sees in the French more joy of living, a higher level of culture and intelligence, a more genuine democratic spirit.

Points Out Defects

At the same time he assumes the liberty of a friend in pointing out what he conceives to be certain defects in the French national character. Avarice, in his opinion, is their besetting sin. The immense number of individuals who live off small unearned incomes tend to bring about class legislation and makes the lot of the wage earner more difficult. The unwillingness of the average business man or investor to take chances has seriously hindered France's development as an industrial nation.

On the whole, however, the author is more severe on the French government than on the French people. Despite its republican institutions, France is governed by a centralized, monarchial form of administration, he says, handed down, with slight changes, from Napoleon I. There is little local autonomy; authority is concentrated in top-heavy fashion in the hands of certain ministers. He cites many personal experiences to show that the French bureaucracy is both arbitrary and inefficient, a sort of glorified Burlesonism.

Mr. Dell makes the accusations, familiar in this country, about the untrustworthiness of politicians and their dependence upon financial interests. In this connection he asserts that certain profiteers, wielding undue influence upon the government, have gravely hampered the work of reconstruction in the devastated provinces by shutting out foreign goods and forcing the unfortunate people to buy their own products at exorbitant prices.

Opposes Colonial Policy

The author shares the typical British liberal's enthusiasm for free trade. He declares that French protectionist policy, in conjunction with the war, has greatly increased the cost of living in the cities. He also believes that France should emulate England in establishing the open door policy for her colonies. He is inclined to deprecate French colonial ventures, on the ground that there is no surplus population for emigration and that African colonies are likely to turn out costly and burdensome experiments.

Mr. Dell would doubtless indorse Gambetta's phrase, "Clericalism, there is the enemy." Nothing in French character appeals to him more than its indifference or aversion to the Church. He describes enthusiastically the campaign of Church disestablishment carried out by the combined parties of the Left. He mentions with approbation the fact that, of all the belligerent countries, France alone officially neither prayed to God for success nor returned thanks for victory.

Mr. Dell's insistent rationalism makes him indifferent to the emotional values involved in the war. He favored a compromise peace in 1917, not because he was a conscious pro-German or enemy of France, but because he did not believe that victory would be worth the price that ultimately was paid for it. Here, of course, he parts company with the majority of the French and the other Allied peoples and aligns himself with the small group of Socialists and defeatists, of whom M. Caillaux, M. Cachin and M. Longuet are representative. The author, however, is free from the bigotry of many dogmatic Socialists; his views are often uncompromisingly radical, but they are expressed with sanity and tolerance. His own intellectual ideal finds excellent unconscious expression in this admirable analysis of his idol, the smybol of French culture, the prophet of the Revolution, Voltaire:

The Typical Frenchman

"Voltaire was the typical Frenchman of the best kind, with the typical French qualities and weaknesses; only in his case the qualities were developed to so rare a degree that they obscured the weaknesses. Rationalist, skeptical, even cynical—if it be cynical to see things as they are—he was at the same time intensely affectionate and his benevolence was almost unlimited. He had a passion for justice and spent half his life, at constant risk to himself, in defending the victims of injustice; only his marvelous ingenuity enabled him to escape the risks that he ran. His immense tolerance was perhaps the result of his cynicism, for, after all, what is called a cynical view of human nature leads to a tolerant and benevolent attitude. It is those who expect too much of human nature that are severe on themselves and their fellow creatures. Beware of a man who is hard on himself, says Anatole France, he may hit you by mistake. Voltaire's tolerance finds its highest expression in the famous sentence of his letter to Helvetius:

"'I wholly disapprove of what you say and will defend to the death your right to say it.'"

Labor Democracy

PAUL W. LITCHFIELD, vice-president and factory manager of the Goodyear Rubber Company, discusses means for allaying labor unrest in "The Industrial Republic" (Houghton Mifflin). He lays down the principle that, after labor has received a fair wage, and capital the current rate of interest, the surplus profits should be divided equally between the two, instead of going to capital alone. He also favors greater employee representation in the management of industry. In this connection he describes a practical scheme by which the workers in the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company at Akron, Ohio, have been given a voice in determining their hours, wages and conditions of employment.

Men Who Disappear

The Mystery of a Double Tragedy

THERE is an atmosphere of genuine horror about Richard Washburn Child's novel, "The Vanishing Men" (Dutton). Brena Selcoss, the heroine, has been loved by two men. And both have disappeared, literally vanished from the face of the earth. One went suddenly, leaving behind only one mysterious clew. The other married Brena and lived on for several years, often overtaken by an ecstasy of fear. Again and again he dropped hints of some impending ghastly terror. And finally he, too, went—and left no trace behind.

This is the grim story that Brena Selcoss tells to Peter De Wolfe, the red-blooded American army officer who has fallen in love with her. Of course, the idea of danger only strengthens his love. He determines to get at the bottom of the mystery, to remove the horror from Brena's life forever. And so he investigates all the facts about Mr. Compton Parmalee, Brena's second lover. Parmalee has concealed the secret of his perpetual terror well; but De Wolfe finally picks up a trail that leads to a New Mexican desert. And there the double tragedy is revealed.

Mr. Child handles his ingenious plot very effectively. To his story of vanishing men he communicates some of the haunting, shivery quality of Stevenson's "The Wrecker." He keeps the secret of his ending unusually well. An ordinary mystery begins to assume definite shape about the halfway stage, but it will take a remarkably good guesser to anticipate the fate of Mr. Child's "Vanishing Men."

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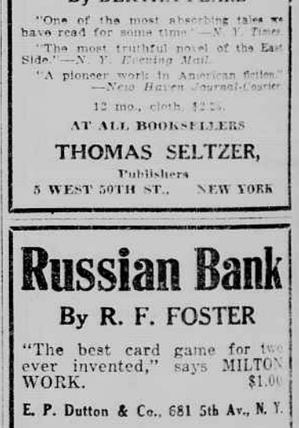
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